United Nations

Committee on Information

Report on the twenty-third session (30 April-11 May 2001)

General Assembly

Official Records
Fifty-sixth Session
Supplement No. 21 (A/56/21)

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Note

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Contents

Chapter		*Paragraphs*	*Page*
I.	Introduction	1–15	1
II.	Organizational questions	16–24	3
	A. Opening of the session	16	3
	B. Election of officers	17	3
	C. Adoption of the agenda and programme of work	18–20	3
	D. Observers	21–22	4
	E. Commemoration of World Press Freedom Day	23	4
	F. Other matters	24	4
III.	General debate	25–56	4
IV.	Consideration of the reports of the Secretary-General	57–69	10
V.	Preparation and adoption of the report of the Committee to the General Assembly at its fifty-sixth session	70–72	13
Annexes			
I.	Statement by the Chairman of the Committee on Information at the opening of the twenty-third session of the Committee, held on 30 April 2001		23
II.	Statement by the Interim Head of the Department of Public Information at the opening of the twenty-third session of the Committee on Information, held on 30 April 2001		25
III.	Statement by the Chairman of the Committee on Information on the occasion of the commemoration of World Press Freedom Day, being held under the theme "Fighting Racism and Promoting Diversity: The Role of the Free Press", held in New York on 3 May 2001		30
IV.	Statement by the Interim Head of the Department of Public Information on operative paragraph 55 of draft resolution B		32

Chapter I
Introduction

1. At its thirty-fourth session, the General Assembly decided to maintain the Committee to Review United Nations Public Information Policies and Activities, established under Assembly resolution 33/115 C of 18 December 1978, which would be known as the Committee on Information, and to increase its membership from 41 to 66. In section I, paragraph 2, of its resolution 34/182 of 18 December 1979, the Assembly requested the Committee on Information:

> "(a) To continue to examine United Nations public information policies and activities, in the light of the evolution of international relations, particularly during the past two decades, and of the imperatives of the establishment of the new international economic order and of a new world information and communication order;
>
> "(b) To evaluate and follow up the efforts made and the progress achieved by the United Nations system in the field of information and communications;
>
> "(c) To promote the establishment of a new, more just and more effective world information and communication order intended to strengthen peace and international understanding and based on the free circulation and wider and better balanced dissemination of information and to make recommendations thereon to the General Assembly",

and requested the Committee on Information and the Secretary-General to report to the Assembly at its thirty-fifth session.

2. At its thirty-fifth session, the General Assembly, in its resolution 35/201 of 16 December 1980, expressed its satisfaction with the work of the Committee on Information, approved the report of the Committee and the recommendations of its Ad Hoc Working Group,[1] reaffirmed the mandate given to the Committee in Assembly resolution 34/182 and decided to increase the membership of the Committee from 66 to 67. The Committee on Information agreed, at its organizational session in 1980, that the principle of geographical rotation would be applied to all the officers of the Committee and that they should be elected for two-year terms of office.

3. At its thirty-sixth to fifty-first sessions (resolutions 36/149 B, 37/94 B, 38/82 B, 39/98 A, 40/164 A, 41/68 A, 42/162 A and B, 43/60 A and B, 44/50, 45/76 A and B, 46/73 B, 47/73 B, 48/44 B, 49/38 B, 50/31 B and 51/138 B), the General Assembly again expressed its satisfaction with the work of the Committee on Information, approved the reports of the Committee[2] and its recommendations and reaffirmed the mandate given to the Committee in its resolution 34/182. At its fifty-second session, the Assembly took note of the report of the Committee[3] and adopted consensus resolutions 52/70 A and B of 10 December 1997. At its fifty-third session, the Assembly took note of the report of the Committee[4] and adopted consensus resolutions 53/59 A and B of 3 December 1998. At its fifty-fourth session, the Assembly took note of the report of the Committee[5] and adopted consensus resolutions 54/82 A and B of 6 December 1999. At its fifty-fifth session, the Assembly took note of the report of the Committee[6] and adopted consensus resolutions 55/136 A and B of 8 December 2000.

4. At its thirty-ninth session, the General Assembly appointed two new members of the Committee, namely China and Mexico; at its forty-first session, the Assembly appointed Malta as a new member of the Committee; at its forty-third session, the Assembly appointed Hungary, Ireland and Zimbabwe as new members of the Committee; and at its forty-fourth session, the Assembly appointed Nepal as a new member.

5. At its forty-fifth session, the General Assembly decided, on the recommendation of the Committee on Information, to increase the membership of the Committee from 74 to 78, and appointed Czechoslovakia, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Jamaica and Uruguay as members. The Assembly also decided to appoint the Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic as a member of the Committee, with immediate effect, to fill the vacancy left by the German Democratic Republic.

6. At its forty-sixth session, the General Assembly decided, on the recommendation of the Special Political Committee, to increase the membership of the Committee from 78 to 79, and appointed Burkina Faso as a member.

7. At its forty-seventh session, the General Assembly decided, on the recommendation of the Special Political Committee, to increase the membership of the Committee on Information from 79 to 81, and appointed the Republic of Korea and Senegal as members.

8. At its forty-eighth session, the General Assembly decided, on the recommendation of the Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee), to increase the membership of the Committee on Information from 81 to 83, and appointed Gabon and Israel as members.

9. At its forty-ninth session, the General Assembly decided, on the recommendation of the Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee), to increase the membership of the Committee on Information from 83 to 88, and appointed Belize, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Kazakhstan and South Africa as members.

10. At its fiftieth session, the General Assembly decided, on the recommendation of the Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee), to increase the membership of the Committee on Information from 88 to 89, and appointed the Democratic People's Republic of Korea as a member.

11. At its fifty-second session, the General Assembly decided, on the recommendation of the Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee), to increase the membership of the Committee on Information from 89 to 90, and appointed Georgia as a member.

12. At its fifty-third session, the General Assembly decided, on the recommendation of the Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee), to increase the membership of the Committee on Information from 90 to 93, and appointed Angola, the Republic of Moldova and Solomon Islands as members.

13. At its fifty-fourth session, the General Assembly decided, on the recommendation of the Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee), to increase the membership of the Committee on Information from 93 to 95, and appointed Liberia and Mozambique as members of the Committee.

14. At its fifty-fifth session, the General Assembly decided, on the recommendation of the Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee), to increase the membership of the Committee on Information from 95 to 97, and appointed Armenia and the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya as members of the Committee. Furthermore, the admission of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia to membership in the United Nations, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 55/12 of 1 November 2000, terminated the membership of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in all organs and subsidiary organs of the United Nations, including the Committee on Information. Accordingly, the membership of the Committee now stands at 96.

15. The Committee is composed of the following Member States:

Algeria
Angola
Argentina
Armenia
Bangladesh
Belarus
Belgium
Belize
Benin
Brazil
Bulgaria
Burkina Faso
Burundi
Chile
China
Colombia
Congo
Costa Rica
Côte d'Ivoire
Croatia
Cuba
Cyprus
Czech Republic
Democratic People's Republic of Korea
Democratic Republic of the Congo
Denmark
Ecuador
Egypt
El Salvador
Ethiopia
Finland
France
Gabon
Georgia
Germany
Ghana
Greece
Guatemala
Guinea
Guyana
Hungary
India
Indonesia
Iran (Islamic Republic of)
Ireland
Israel
Italy
Jamaica
Japan
Jordan
Kazakhstan
Kenya
Lebanon
Liberia
Libyan Arab Jamahiriya
Malta
Mexico
Mongolia
Morocco
Mozambique
Nepal
Netherlands
Niger
Nigeria
Pakistan
Peru
Philippines
Poland
Portugal
Republic of Korea
Republic of Moldova
Romania
Russian Federation
Senegal
Singapore
Slovakia
Solomon Islands
Somalia
South Africa
Spain
Sri Lanka
Sudan
Syrian Arab Republic
Togo
Trinidad and Tobago
Tunisia
Turkey
Ukraine
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland
United Republic of Tanzania
United States of America
Uruguay
Venezuela
Viet Nam
Yemen
Zimbabwe

Chapter II
Organizational questions

A. Opening of the session

16. The organizational meeting of the twenty-third session of the Committee on Information was held on 30 April 2001 at United Nations Headquarters. The session was opened by the Chairman of the Committee, Elhassane Zahid (Morocco).

B. Election of officers

17. In accordance with the principle of geographic rotation, the Committee held elections for a new Bureau for a two-year term. Upon his nomination by the representative of Mexico, Milos Alcalay (Venezuela) was elected Chairman by acclamation. Upon their nominations by the representatives of Azerbaijan, Indonesia and Spain, Ivan Matchavariani (Georgia), Dorjsuren Tserenpil (Mongolia) and Peter Mollema (Netherlands) were elected Vice-Chairmen by acclamation. Upon his nomination by the representative of Mozambique, Walid A. Haggag (Egypt) was elected Rapporteur also by acclamation. The officers of the Committee on Information for the period 2001-2002 are thus as follows:

Chairman:
Milos Alcalay (Venezuela)

Vice-Chairmen:
Ivan Matchavariani (Georgia)
Dorjsuren Tserenpil (Mongolia)
Peter Mollema (Netherlands)

Rapporteur:
Walid A. Haggag (Egypt)

C. Adoption of the agenda and programme of work

18. At its organizational meeting, the Committee adopted the following agenda and programme of work (A/AC.198/2001/1/Rev.1):

1. Opening of the session.
2. Election of officers.
3. Adoption of the agenda and programme of work.
4. Statement by the Chairman.
5. Statement by the Interim Head, Department of Public Information.
6. General debate.
7. Commemoration of World Press Freedom Day.
8. Consideration of reports submitted by the Secretary-General.
9. Open-ended working group of the Committee on Information.
10. Consideration and adoption of the report of the Committee to the General Assembly at its fifty-sixth session.

19. The Committee held the substantive meetings of its twenty-third session at United Nations Headquarters from 30 April to 11 May 2001.

20. For its consideration of agenda item 8, the Committee had before it the reports of the Secretary-General on:

(a) Reorientation of United Nations activities in the field of public information and communications (A/AC.198/2001/2);

(b) Public information activities for United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations (2001) (A/AC.198/2001/3);

(c) Integration of United Nations information centres with field offices of the United Nations Development Programme: implementation of the views of host Governments (A/AC.198/2001/4);

(d) Equitable disbursement of resources to United Nations information centres (A/AC.198/2001/5);

(e) Cooperation between the Department of Public Information and the University for Peace in Costa Rica (A/AC.198/2001/6);

(f) Progress report on the implementation of the pilot project on the development of an international radio broadcasting capacity for the United Nations (A/AC.198/2001/7);

(g) Continued multilingual development, maintenance and enrichment of the United Nations web site (A/AC.198/2001/8);

(h) Activities of the Joint United Nations Information Committee in 2000 (A/AC.198/2001/9).

D. Observers

21. The following Member States took part in the session as observers: Antigua and Barbuda, Azerbaijan, Bahamas, Monaco, Saudi Arabia, Tajikistan and United Arab Emirates. The Holy See and Palestine also participated as observers.

22. Representatives of the following specialized agencies also participated as observers: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), World Health Organization and World Intellectual Property Organization.

E. Commemoration of World Press Freedom Day

23. On 3 May 2001, the Committee observed World Press Freedom Day 2001, organized by the Department of Public Information. To mark the tenth anniversary of the Windhoek Declaration on Promoting an Independent and Pluralistic African Press, the commemoration was linked to the United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations (2001) and to the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, to be held in Durban, South Africa, from 31 August to 7 September 2001. The programme had as its theme "Fighting racism and promoting diversity: the role of the free press". The President of the General Assembly, the Secretary-General, the Chairman of the Committee on Information and the Deputy Director-General of UNESCO addressed the meeting, and a number of distinguished panellists participated. Following a request by Mexico that the statement delivered by the Chairman of the Committee on Information be part of the official records of the Committee, the text of the statement is contained in annex III to the present report.

F. Other matters

24. The Chairman informed the Committee that Azerbaijan and Monaco had requested to become members of the Committee on Information.

Chapter III
General debate

25. Statements during the general debate were made by the following States members of the Committee on Information: Algeria, Angola, Bangladesh, Belarus, Brazil, Chile (on behalf of the Rio Group), China, Cuba, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Egypt, Guyana, India, Indonesia, Islamic Republic of Iran (on behalf of the Group of 77 and China), Jamaica (on behalf of the Caribbean Community), Japan, Kazakhstan, Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Mexico (on behalf of 20 Spanish-speaking countries), Mongolia, Mozambique (on behalf of the Community of Portuguese-speaking countries), Nepal, Netherlands (on behalf of the Western European and other States Group), Nigeria, Pakistan, Portugal, Republic of Korea, Russian Federation, Syrian Arab Republic, Ukraine, United States of America and Yemen.

26. The observers for Azerbaijan, Monaco, Tajikistan and the United Arab Emirates also made statements in the general debate. The Director of the New York Office of UNESCO also addressed the Committee, as did the observer for Palestine, on behalf of the Arab Group.

27. In taking up the substantive questions before the Committee, all speakers noted that they attached great importance to the commemoration of World Press Freedom Day on 3 May and to the values that it represented. Many delegations reiterated that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights proclaims that all people have the right to freedom of opinion and expression. They condemned violence against journalists to silence or obstruct them, and paid tribute to those who have lost their lives or have been injured in the line of duty. One delegation observed that freedom of the press is a fundamental tenet of democracy.

28. All speakers pointed to the importance of information in the new millennium and the critical role that it could play in national empowerment and development. A number of delegations stated that there

must be a new, more just and effective global information and communications order, based on a free and balanced flow of information to all people. One speaker referred to information as a major tool in the transmission of the truth and promoting the goals of peace and humanity. However, in his view, legal and ethical criteria were required for its dissemination. One speaker referred to the need for international information security.

29. Many delegations noted that the inherent potential of the global village had given way to the inequalities of the digital divide. They agreed that many developing countries currently did not have the infrastructure and resources to benefit from modern information technology. A number of speakers pointed to the Secretary-General's millennium report (A/54/2000), in which he offered a timely analysis of this divide, characterizing it as a very serious problem facing the world in the twenty-first century. They agreed with him that the United Nations must now fully tap the potential of the information revolution and help to bridge the gap between North and South by upgrading its information technology to better inform the world's people of the Organization's aims and achievements.

30. One speaker, on behalf of a large group, noted that the ministerial declaration adopted by the Economic and Social Council at the high-level segment of its substantive session of 2000 recognized the potential of information and communication technologies for spurring economic growth and social development, as well as the possibility that their utilization could lead to further disparities between and within countries. Delegations agreed that there was a need to make maximum use of all avenues of cooperation for the development of information and communication capabilities in developing countries. Several speakers pointed to the work of UNESCO in supporting projects for promoting universal access to information. In this connection, several delegations noted that this was particularly critical for the African continent.

31. Committee members strongly endorsed the view of world leaders at the Millennium Summit, held in September 2000, that the challenge was now to ensure that globalization would become a positive force for the world's people. Since the Millennium Declaration had proclaimed the right of universal access to information and communication technologies, many delegations commended the Secretary-General for his leadership in building bridges over the digital divide, by establishing the United Nations Information Technology Service, the Health InterNetwork and the Information and Communications Technology Task Force. One delegation noted that its country had already contributed to the United Nations Information Technology Service and urged other Governments to do likewise.

32. All speakers strongly supported the Secretary-General's initiative in assigning a major role to communications and information activities in order to build broad-based global support for the Organization. They agreed with him that the goals of the United Nations could not be attained without the efforts by the Department of Public Information to build an informed understanding by the world's public of the work and objectives of the United Nations. They reiterated that the Department must mobilize the public support generated by the Millennium Summit and communicate effectively to a global audience that the United Nations was truly the indispensable common house of the entire human family. Many delegations called upon the Department to disseminate balanced and objective information and to project an open and transparent Organization. In the words of one speaker, the Department provided the only information outlet that could give a holistic view of the United Nations in the face of sometimes negative press coverage of its work.

33. Several speakers referred to the working methods of the Committee on Information. One delegation, on behalf of a large group, noted that the structure of the resolution traditionally adopted is a good one, and looked forward to open and flexible exchange and negotiation with a view to achieving consensus. Other speakers also called for consensus in the deliberations of the Committee. One delegation noted that aspects of draft resolution A were today more important than ever before, and did not think that it could be replaced with a discussion on the digital divide, although that was a serious topic. One speaker, on behalf of a large group, said that in order to intensify the dialogue with the Department of Public Information meetings should be held between representatives of the regional groups and the Department, perhaps once every three months, to discuss implementation of the Committee's recommendations.

34. Committee members welcomed the new Interim Head of the Department of Public Information, and

also commended the excellent leadership of his predecessor, Under-Secretary-General Kensaku Hogen. They generally praised the measures that had been taken to date in the reorientation process, noting in particular the Department's efforts to develop a culture of communications within the Organization and to develop a strategic vision within the Secretariat. One delegation, on behalf of a large group, welcomed the Department's initiatives to undertake organizational shifts and obtain quality feedback from audiences. Several noted that a clear definition of priorities and the intelligent allocation of resources were now critical for the Department to enable it to use the appropriate mix of communications tools. One speaker, on behalf of a large group, noted that the Committee would need to formulate policies to strengthen the Department's effectiveness for it to meet the challenges of the twenty-first century, and that the Department must realize the slogan "Global vision, local voice" by reaching out to key redisseminators, namely, the media and non-governmental organizations. Another delegation noted that, in view of the limited resources available to the Department, efforts must be made to rationalize its activities, adopt new technologies, and cooperate with and mobilize the private sector. One speaker noted that it was imperative for the Committee to give the Department clear mandates, while at the same time backing them up with the necessary resources. He further emphasized that the attrition of posts in the Department must be halted. One speaker insisted that no decision that affected the future of the Department should be taken unless it was first debated in the Committee, in order not to sideline the Committee.

35. All speakers pointed to the enormous outreach possibilities opened up by the communications revolution, and strongly supported the Department's embrace of new technology in all aspects of its work. They unanimously commended the Department for developing and maintaining the United Nations web site, which they agreed was a major communications tool for amplifying the Organization's message and providing information to hundreds of millions of people around the world. One speaker noted that the web site team was a textbook example of what could be accomplished by using existing resources, and questioned the need for an outside contractor to rationalize the site. On the subject of user-friendliness, several speakers noted that the redesigned web site was sometimes difficult to navigate. On the other hand, one delegation characterized the web site as user-friendly, comprehensive and rich in content. One speaker commended the Department for increasing the content and links devoted to United Nations relations with civil society and the business sector. A number of speakers were pleased to note that the Department had given its support to launching a United Nations Radio web page in Portuguese, which would soon be available. One delegation commended the Department for the development of the Committee on Information site, and others welcomed the "The UN works" page. Several speakers called for the optical disk system to be linked as soon as possible to the United Nations web site, thereby enhancing the multilingual character of the site and making information freely available to all. One speaker, on behalf of a group, noted that United Nations web sites had income-generation potential in some instances. Several speakers agreed that the Department should take the lead in establishing one central Internet portal to encompass all web sites in the United Nations system.

36. The issue of multilingualism in all of the work of the Organization, especially in its information activities, was a major topic of debate for many delegations. They expressed particular concern with regard to the lack of parity on the web site among the six official languages of the Organization. It was pointed out by a number of speakers that this situation would worsen the digital divide. Several noted that, while there had been some improvement on multilingualism, more remained to be done. One speaker noted that the format of the main pages on the web site was identical in all languages, even though the volume of information was not equal. Another delegation noted that the web pages in Chinese were only 10 to 15 per cent of those in English and French. One speaker noted that, in regard to proposals to enrich language sites, actual usage of sites must not be the only criterion. A technical survey was required, he noted, to establish requirements for obtaining parity.

37. One delegation, speaking also for a group of 20 Spanish-speaking countries, strongly criticized the increasing imbalance in the Organization with regard to the use of official and working languages. More specifically, she noted that the Spanish-speaking countries could not accept this situation. She put forward a detailed plan, which she requested be transmitted to the Secretary-General, calling for a number of steps to help achieve language parity in the

Organization's work. Another speaker, on behalf of a large group, called for real, not rhetorical, commitment to achieving multilingualism in the Organization and he, too, asked that resources be committed to the use of the Spanish language, commensurate with the number of Spanish-speaking people in the world. A number of delegations noted that the Arabic language should be more widely used in information materials generally, with one delegation stating that the necessary resources must be allocated to make this possible.

38. While strongly agreeing that technological innovation and electronic media are critical to the dissemination of United Nations information, a large number of speakers in the Committee emphasized the critical importance of traditional means of dissemination. Some suggested that they had become more important than ever before to countries and people on the other side of the digital divide. Delegations agreed that radio continued to be the most widely used medium available in developing countries and, in the words of one speaker, its capacity to serve the needs of developing countries should be optimized. Many noted that its importance for the people of Africa could not be overemphasized. Committee members widely praised the pilot project for the development of an international radio broadcasting capacity for the United Nations, which provided 15-minute radio news bulletins in the six official languages, which were being broadcast by hundreds of radio stations. They agreed that those daily transmissions helped the Department to ensure the dissemination of full and objective United Nations information on a global scale. Many delegations agreed that the project must be extended beyond the pilot stage and placed on a stable footing, with adequate funding. Another delegation, concurring with the view of the Secretary-General that the pilot project had been one of the more dramatic and successful examples of the reorientation of the Department of Public Information, noted that it should become a cornerstone of information activities, and he looked forward to the final report on the results of the project.

39. A number of speakers, including one on behalf of a group, stressed the importance that they attached to the Department's Portuguese-language activities and pointed to the success of those efforts. As a consequence, they reiterated their strong support for strengthening the capacities of the Portuguese language programming of United Nations Radio, and commended the tireless efforts of the staff member involved. One delegation emphasized the importance of radio for the Russian-speaking audience. Another speaker pointed to the fact that the radio programming in Bahasa Indonesian constituted one of the most effective methods of communicating information to more than 200 million people in the region. One delegation, speaking on behalf of a group, again called upon the Department to introduce radio programming in Creole for the Haitian public.

40. With regard to television, one speaker, on behalf of a large group, commended the Department for the continued airing of programmes about the Organization on channel 78 of a Manhattan cable network, and wished to explore how such programmes could be given worldwide coverage. Another asked about the availability of the products of United Nations Television in Arabic.

41. One delegation, speaking on behalf of a large group, noted that the ability of the United Nations to communicate its message and relevance to audiences depended on how it projected its operations to the media. It was heartened that the information flow from the United Nations to journalists was beginning to increase substantially, and that technological advances had been made in that regard. A number of speakers mentioned the success and usefulness of the United Nations News Centre, now hosted on the web site, which one delegation said was proving to be a key element for the work of journalists everywhere, and NewsAlert, the service which was expected to be launched before the next session of the General Assembly. One speaker, in referring to the Department's press releases, said that they should bring out the intergovernmental aspect of the Organization's work and deliberations. Another speaker questioned the need for the production after meetings of "near-verbatim" press releases, which did not appear to be geared to satisfying the needs of neither the press nor the public. A third speaker called for the issuance of press releases in all six languages, as supported by the General Assembly, and another referred to the importance of posting the releases on the United Nations web site in a timely manner.

42. One Committee member commended the quality of the flagship magazine, the *UN Chronicle*, and mentioned the Indian edition of the magazine, which was being issued at no cost to the Organization, an approach that could be explored for other regions. In

his view, the publication's periodicity and multilingualism required further examination.

43. One delegation denounced the aggression against it in the form of radio and television broadcasts from another country as flagrant violations of international law. Those were illegal acts that were being committed using increasingly sophisticated technology, he said, and he demanded a cessation of that aggression. Exercising its right of reply, another delegation noted that this was not a constructive interjection, to which the former delegation responded that the money used on the media aggression could be put to good use by the Organization and reiterated his condemnation of this aggression against his country.

44. One delegation noted that it wished to include a paragraph in the resolution that would propose preventing the media from undermining democracy, fanning ethnic strife and contributing to manifestations of extremism. Another was concerned about hate media, and called upon the Department to develop programmes to address its harmful effects on peace and security.

45. One delegation was especially concerned about the power of the media to distort information through selectivity or a partisan intent. It pointed to the excessive preoccupation with armed conflicts in the past few years, and noted that there was a vaster reality of underdevelopment which may not be breaking news but had been soul-breaking news for countless generations.

46. Many speakers pointed to the call by the General Assembly to maintain and improve activities in the areas of special interest to developing countries and those with special needs, including countries in transition. In the words of one delegation, if the Department did not focus on the development agenda in its work, the Organization would be irrelevant to three billion poor people of the world, representing half of the world's population. Many delegations called upon the Department to publicize United Nations activities and accomplishments on sustainable human development issues, including poverty eradication, women's rights and empowerment, children's issues, the environment, health and education. A number of speakers praised the Department's large-scale promotional campaign for the Millennium Summit, with one suggesting that those efforts had largely contributed to the success of that event. Several speakers also noted that the "The UN works" programme is publicizing United Nations activities, in particular activities related to economic and social development, around the world. Many delegations expressed support for a wide range of thematic campaigns being carried out by the Department, especially with regard to the publicizing of upcoming major international conferences and special sessions of the General Assembly. A number of delegations emphasized the importance that they attached to the success of the Third International Conference on the Least Developed Countries and the Department's intensive work on it. Several pointed to the Department's programmes to publicize the special session of the General Assembly for an overall review and appraisal of the implementation of the Habitat Agenda, the special session of the General Assembly on HIV/AIDS, and the United Nations Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects. Many spoke of the importance that they attached to the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, and strongly supported the Department's information campaign for the Conference.

47. A number of speakers pointed to the important work being done to promote the United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations (2001), and noted the Department's efforts to depict the United Nations, in the words of one speaker, as a forum in which fruitful dialogue can flourish. Several speakers called for the Department to disseminate information on the International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-Violence for the Children of the World (2001-2010). Several speakers called for increased dissemination of information on the question of Palestine, and called for an enhanced role for the Committee in uncovering the facts related to the suffering of the Palestinian people and the acts of aggression perpetrated against them. One speaker mentioned that the archives of the United Nations were filled with information, reports, resolutions and recommendations related to the question of Palestine and the internationally accepted rights of the Palestinian people, and stressed the need for the Department to utilize those documents through all means to expose the oppressive policies to which the Palestinian people were being subjected. A number of speakers underscored the importance of the Department's training programme for Palestinian journalists. Similarly, a number of delegations were highly supportive of the Department's training

programme for broadcasters and journalists from developing countries and countries in transition, and asked that it be expanded. One speaker pointed to the need to publicize the Second International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism, and called upon the Department to redouble its efforts related to the self-determination of peoples. Another speaker emphasized the important role that the press and radio had played in the past as instruments of mobilizing national liberation movements, in order to win the battle against colonialism during the 1960s and 1970s. The same speaker expressed his concern at the attempts by certain forces to control means of communications and their application for their own interests and objectives and, in this connection, called upon the United Nations and the Department of Public Information to assume their responsibility in exposing the "double standards" used by those forces in approaching issues of human rights and the armed struggle of peoples for self-determination, justice and equality on the basis of the Charter of the United Nations, the provisions of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other relevant conventions. Several delegations thanked the Department for its work to publicize the fifteenth anniversary of the Chernobyl disaster, noting the related web page in particular. One delegation noted that it hoped that the problems of the Semipalatinsk region, which had been affected by nuclear tests, would, as usual, be reflected in the Committee's resolution. One speaker, on behalf of a large group, called upon the Department to promote the twentieth anniversary of the signing of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea in 2002. Another expressed support for the Department's cooperation with the private sector in convening two experience-sharing workshops in communication for senior officials, held in New York and Turin.

48. All speakers agreed on the important role of public information in United Nations peacekeeping operations, especially in the troop-contributing countries. Many agreed that information activities to provide local populations with access to impartial information were essential. It was underscored by a number of speakers that cooperation between the Department of Public Information and the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, both at the planning and implementation stages, was essential. Several delegations noted that they attached great importance to the central role played by the Department of Public Information in the selection of spokespersons for United Nations missions. One delegation, speaking on behalf of a group, noted that radio programming in peacekeeping operations was an indispensable tool of communication as, for example, in the case of Radio UNAMSIL in Sierra Leone.

49. Several speakers requested more information on the implications of the proposals contained in the report of the Secretary-General on resource requirements for the implementation of the recommendations of the Panel on United Nations Peace Operations. In so doing, they questioned whether there is a risk that the Department's role in peace missions might be weakened. One delegation noted that it agreed with the recommendations contained in the Panel's report on enhancing planning and operational support for the public information for peacekeeping operations, and another called upon the Department to assist in the implementation of those recommendations. One speaker could not support the attempt to continue reducing the already decreased structures of the Department of Public Information, based on recommendations contained in the Panel's report. Another delegation agreed, noting that strengthening the Peace and Security Section in the Department of Public Information would better equip it to meet the challenges of providing operational support to United Nations missions. In its view, the Department of Public Information was best placed to lend such expertise to the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, and similarly, the Cartographic Unit and the Media Monitoring and Analysis Unit would best be left in the Department. Some delegations made it clear that the Committee on Information was the appropriate body to consider any recommendations of the Secretary-General on the Panel's report that might impact the Department of Public Information. On the subject of peacekeeping, one speaker said that the United Nations must send observers to the occupied territories to investigate the sufferings of the Palestinian people.

50. A number of speakers expressed their appreciation for the information resources and the services available in the Dag Hammarskjöld Library. One speaker, on behalf of a large group, pointed to the Department's strategic efforts to computerize the Library, which were welcomed. Other delegations agreed that the launching of the United Nations Bibliographic Information System on the Web, the Library's premiere database on the Internet, were certain to facilitate access to documents. One speaker,

also on behalf of a large group, said that his group supported the development of United Nations libraries in becoming modern, integrated libraries accessible to all audiences. Others pointed to the training courses organized by the Library, and encouraged their further development for the staff of permanent missions.

51. Many speakers emphasized that the United Nations information centres played a significant role in disseminating information about the work of the Organization and characterized them as "windows on the world". Their importance to the people of developing countries was underscored, and one delegation, speaking on behalf of a large group, said that information centres should be given adequate resources to ensure that the needs of those who could benefit most from information would be met. One delegation was pleased to note that 40 per cent of all information centres were in Africa, where they could make an invaluable contribution, as was the case at the centre in New Delhi, his capital. In a related comment, one delegation asked that funding be ensured for information centres in Africa, as they contributed to development there, in partnership with the agencies and programmes of the United Nations system.

52. Many speakers noted that the integration process should be considered on a case-by-case basis in consultation with the host country concerned. One delegation reiterated its concern for the existing difficulties in the integration process. Several Committee members asked for a status report on the integrated centres. At the same time, a number of speakers, including one who spoke for a large group, said that they fully supported the initiative of the Secretary-General to develop United Nations houses, which would be a practical means to heighten the visibility of the United Nations presence and enhance understanding of its activities, as well as a cost-saving measure. One delegation, in particular, noted that the Secretary-General had attended the official opening of the United Nations House in Tokyo, and stated that his Government highly valued the work of the United Nations information centre in Tokyo as the core public information unit in that newly established United Nations House. He added that the building and land had been provided by his Government on a rent-free basis.

53. A number of delegations expressed concern about the equitable disbursement of resources to the information centres, in particular to those in developing countries, and felt that further efforts were needed to rationalize this process. They supported the appeal made by the Secretary-General to the host Governments of information centres to facilitate the work of the centres in their countries by the provision of rent-free or rent-subsidized office space.

54. In commending the excellent work achieved by the information centre in Lisbon, one delegation said that it played an important role in disseminating information to other Portuguese-speaking countries where the United Nations did not have the same means to inform the public. Several speakers noted that communications technology had made a significant contribution to the efficiency and effectiveness of the information centres and called for all centres to be suitably equipped. One speaker noted that all information centres should have web sites, pointing to the necessity for the centre in Port-of-Spain to have one, as it served the entire Caribbean region. One delegation suggested that information centres could contribute to the development of gender-sensitive policies relating to information and communications technology in their host countries.

55. One delegation, speaking for a large group, said that her group looked forward to the enhanced information component in the multi-island office of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Kingston. One speaker expressed serious concern about the fact that the centre in his capital had not had a Director since the previous incumbent had left Dhaka years ago. The centre had been de facto integrated with UNDP, and he wished to know when a Director would be posted there. Similarly, one Committee member was concerned about the elimination of the post of information officer at the United Nations Office in Minsk.

56. At the end of the general debate, the Interim Head of the Department of Public Information made a statement, in which he responded to some of the questions raised by delegations.

Chapter IV
Consideration of the reports of the Secretary-General

57. Seven reports of the Secretary-General were introduced by the Interim Head of the Department and senior staff members, and were discussed individually

by the Committee. The report of the Secretary-General on the reorientation of United Nations activities in the field of public information and communications (A/AC.198/2001/2) were considered in the opening remarks of the Interim Head and later in the general debate, and therefore did not receive a separate review.

58. Concerning the report of the Secretary-General on public information activities for the United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations (2001) (A/AC.198/2001/3), the Department noted that it had undertaken a campaign which would help to foster a positive perception of diversity, as well as depict the United Nations as a forum in which dialogue in every field of human endeavour could flourish. The culmination of the activities for the Year would be on 3 and 4 December 2001, when the Year would be officially commemorated by the General Assembly. One delegation, on behalf of a group, noted that the General Assembly's call for dialogue had been well received around the world and would help to promote further respect for all civilizations. It was noted that a group of eminent persons selected by the Secretary-General was working with his Personal Representative for the Year on a book that would focus on diversity. One speaker questioned why only the British Broadcasting Corporation and the Cable News Network had been cited in the report in connection with the broadcast of public service announcements. The Department replied that those organizations had been the first to provide an affirmative answer. Subsequently, however, announcements had gone to approximately 100 television channels around the world.

59. The Department introduced the reports of the Secretary-General on the integration of United Nations information centres with UNDP field offices, implementation of the views of host Governments (A/AC.198/2001/4), and on equitable disbursement of resources to United Nations information centres (A/AC.198/2001/5). On the latter report, the Department noted that annual cash contributions by host Governments had had a very positive impact on the successful operation of many centres. It was noted in the annex to the report that, with regard to the information centre in Bogotá, the Government had contributed more than was indicated, bringing the total to US$ 66,466. The Department made a clarification regarding the expenses of the information centre in Tokyo, which paid rent to the United Nations University (UNU). In fact, UNU had agreed to lower the rent by 30 per cent in 2001. The Department emphasized that the generosity of Member States that had made rent-free premises available or otherwise contributed to operating requirements, had been recognized by the Secretary-General.

60. One speaker commented on the disparities in the allocation of posts to information centres. In some developing countries, the highest post level was P-4, and that situation needed to be improved. Another delegation noted that it understood the financial limitations faced by the Department; however, it hoped that special efforts could be made to provide resources to the centres in developing countries, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa. The Department responded that it would continue to study the staffing of the information centres to find effective solutions to ensure the widest possible information outreach.

61. With regard to the report of the Secretary-General on cooperation between the Department of Public Information and the University for Peace in Costa Rica (A/AC.198/2001/6), the Department noted that the relationship between the Organization and the University was a long-standing one that dated back to the 1970s. Many cooperative activities had been undertaken throughout the year and steps were now being taken to enhance the University's facilities to broadcast the Organization's live radio programming.

62. As regards the progress report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the pilot project on the development of an international radio broadcasting capacity for the United Nations (A/AC.198/2001/7), the Department thanked all the Member States that cooperated with the Organization to make the ground-breaking new project possible, in all six official languages, and with a small Kiswahili and Portuguese component. The radio initiative by the Organization, in cooperation with radio broadcasting organizations around the world, had transformed the way in which the United Nations reached out to peoples everywhere. The response had been overwhelming. As a consequence, the number of radio tapes being distributed had been reduced to date from 3,000 to 2,000 per week, with further reductions anticipated. That meant that resources would be saved, which could then be invested in direct broadcasting. The Department noted that the project was only six months old and was therefore still evolving. However, United Nations daily programming was now being transmitted

in about 100 countries. The Department would seek both to build more partnerships, in cooperation with Member States, and to enhance the availability of the content.

63. A number of speakers expressed their strong support for the radio pilot project, and noted that they attached great importance to that form of United Nations outreach, particularly in developing countries. One delegation noted that Latin America, in particular, was benefiting from this direct programming which, as one Committee member noted, provided a good example of the results that could be achieved when all sides pooled their efforts.

64. The Department pointed out, however, that neither the mandate nor the resources existed to continue the project in the biennium 2002-2003. This was, therefore, a matter for further discussion, and the project's extension depended on the assessment by the General Assembly. The Department stated that the cost of the project was estimated at $1.7 million per year, and, while clearly another pilot project was not necessary, it would be advisable, if possible, to maintain the existing level of programming for the foreseeable future.

65. With regard to the report of the Secretary-General on continued multilingual development, maintenance and enrichment of the United Nations web site (A/AC.198/2001/8), the Department indicated that, since the preparation of the report, the site had been receiving four million accesses per day, with the average number of documents viewed amounting to 410,000. The Department underscored that there were two aspects to the issue of multilingual development of the United Nations web site. To ensure regular maintenance and enhancement of the site, a sound foundation in terms of staffing and resources was required. While some measures had already been taken, within existing resources, further development of the site would need additional allocations, and the Department still believed that a feasibility study should be undertaken. At the same time, the issue of content creation and development would need to be dealt with on a wider, organizational basis.

66. A number of speakers reiterated their praise for the Department's work on the United Nations web site. The issue of multilingualism was widely discussed, and Committee members were unanimous in their call for parity of all six official languages on the web site. They were of the view that the General Assembly's call for linguistic parity had not been heeded, and that therefore, it was essential that action be taken to correct the imbalance. One delegation called upon the Secretariat to submit a written breakdown of the precise number of staff working on each of the language web sites. Delegations also requested a further analysis of the web site accesses in terms of users' regions, languages and chosen subjects. The Department responded that it was acquiring new software that would facilitate such analysis. It was also noted, however, that the location of users was sometimes difficult to establish because service providers were often located in different areas.

67. Several delegations noted their appreciation for the clarity and honesty of the Department's report. They acknowledged that parity on the web site was not a problem for the Department of Public Information to solve alone, as it could only be addressed in concert with all content-creating departments. Speakers mentioned a range of web site issues, such as the availability of the optical disk system, income-generation possibilities, a common portal for the system, the development and expansion of an index, and web site accessibility for people with disabilities. One delegation raised the matter of distributing materials on the web site before they are issued in hard copy, which is a clear violation of United Nations rules and must not be repeated.

68. The Interim Head of the Department stated that multilingualism was a cardinal principle for the Department, to the extent that resources allowed. Additional tasks could not be taken on within the existing resources and staffing table of the Department of Public Information without abandoning activities mandated by the General Assembly. He also reminded the Committee that the Department of Public Information had lost 103 posts since the biennium 1992-1993. He noted that Member States had previously been presented with a figure in excess of US$ 600 million as the amount required for achieving full parity of the six official languages on the web site, a figure that had not been accepted. One delegation noted that the door had now been opened for proposals from the Committee; since the budget has not yet been adopted for the next biennium, it was premature to accept that no resources would be available for the web site, and further discussions must take place.

69. With regard to the report of the Secretary-General on the activities of the Joint United Nations Information Committee in 2000 (A/AC.198/2001/9), the Department recalled that, at its last session, the Committee had endorsed the "The UN works" promotional programme as a system-wide initiative to be coordinated by the Department. Furthermore, Committee members had expressed strong interest in working together to use new information technology to communicate the United Nations message to audiences around the world. The Department noted that there was support for system-wide cooperation in the field of television, the United Nations News Service on the Internet and on the international radio broadcasting capacity.

Chapter V
Preparation and adoption of the report of the Committee to the General Assembly at its fifty-sixth session

70. At the sixth plenary meeting of the Committee, prior to the adoption of draft resolution B, the Interim Head of the Department of Public Information made a statement with regard to operative paragraph 55 of the draft. At the request of the representative of the Netherlands, speaking on behalf of the Western European and Other States Group, the text of this statement is contained in annex IV to the present report. The Committee proceeded to adopt by consensus the draft report, as orally amended, including the following two draft resolutions and draft decision:

Draft resolution A
Information in the service of humanity

The General Assembly,

Taking note of the comprehensive and important report of the Committee on Information,[6]

Also taking note of the report of the Secretary-General on questions relating to information,[7]

Urges all countries, organizations of the United Nations system as a whole and all others concerned, reaffirming their commitment to the principles of the Charter of the United Nations and to the principles of freedom of the press and freedom of information, as well as to those of the independence, pluralism and diversity of the media, deeply concerned by the disparities existing between developed and developing countries and the consequences of every kind arising from those disparities that affect the capability of the public, private or other media and individuals in developing countries to disseminate information and communicate their views and their cultural and ethical values through endogenous cultural production, as well as to ensure the diversity of sources and their free access to information, and recognizing the call in this context for what in the United Nations and at various international forums has been termed "a new world information and communication order, seen as an evolving and continuous process":

(a) To cooperate and interact with a view to reducing existing disparities in information flows at all levels by increasing assistance for the development of communication infrastructures and capabilities in developing countries, with due regard for their needs and the priorities attached to such areas by those countries, and in order to enable them and the public, private or other media in developing countries to develop their own information and communication policies freely and independently and increase the participation of media and individuals in the communication process, and to ensure a free flow of information at all levels;

(b) To ensure for journalists the free and effective performance of their professional tasks and condemn resolutely all attacks against them;

(c) To provide support for the continuation and strengthening of practical training programmes for broadcasters and journalists from public, private and other media in developing countries;

(d) To enhance regional efforts and cooperation among developing countries, as well as cooperation between developed and developing countries, to strengthen communication capacities and to improve the media infrastructure and communication technology in the developing countries, especially in the areas of training and dissemination of information;

(e) To aim at, in addition to bilateral cooperation, providing all possible support and assistance to the developing countries and their media, public, private or other, with due regard to their

interests and needs in the field of information and to action already adopted within the United Nations system, including:

(i) The development of the human and technical resources that are indispensable for the improvement of information and communication systems in developing countries and support for the continuation and strengthening of practical training programmes, such as those already operating under both public and private auspices throughout the developing world;

(ii) The creation of conditions that will enable developing countries and their media, public, private or other, to have, by using their national and regional resources, the communication technology suited to their national needs, as well as the necessary programme material, especially for radio and television broadcasting;

(iii) Assistance in establishing and promoting telecommunication links at the subregional, regional and interregional levels, especially among developing countries;

(iv) The facilitation, as appropriate, of access by the developing countries to advanced communication technology available on the open market;

(f) To provide full support for the International Programme for the Development of Communication[8] of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, which should support both public and private media.

Draft resolution B
United Nations public information policies and activities

The General Assembly,

Reiterating its decision to consolidate the role of the Committee on Information as its main subsidiary body mandated to make recommendations to it relating to the work of the Department of Public Information of the Secretariat,

Concurring with the view of the Secretary-General that public information and communications should be placed at the heart of the strategic management of the United Nations, and that a culture of communications should permeate all levels of the Organization, as a means of fully informing the peoples of the world of the aims and activities of the United Nations, in accordance with principles and purposes enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations, in order to create broad-based global support for the United Nations,

Stressing that the primary mission of the Department of Public Information is to provide, through its outreach activities, accurate, impartial, comprehensive and timely information to the public on the tasks and responsibilities of the United Nations in order to strengthen international support for the activities of the Organization with the greatest transparency,

Expressing its concern that the gap in the information and communication technologies between the developed and the developing countries has continued to widen and that vast segments of the population in developing countries are not benefiting from the present information and technology revolution and, in this regard, underlining the necessity of rectifying the imbalances of the global information and technology revolution in order to make it more just, equitable and effective,

Recognizing that developments in the information and communication technology revolution open vast new opportunities for economic growth and social development and can play an important role in eradication of poverty in developing countries and, at the same time, emphasizing that it also poses challenges and risks and could lead to further widening of disparities between and within countries,

Stating that the present developments and rapid changes in the field of information and communication technology have a tremendous impact on the functioning of the United Nations and the Department of Public Information in particular, which may necessitate suitable adjustments in the manner in which the mandate of the Department is implemented,

Noting other initiatives aimed at bridging the digital divide, including those by the World Bank, the International Telecommunication Union, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, the United Nations Development Programme, the Digital Opportunity Task Force of the Group of Eight Nations and the Group of 77 South Summit,

Recalling its resolutions 50/11 of 2 November 1995, 52/23 of 25 November 1997 and 54/64 of 6 December 1999 on multilingualism, and emphasizing the importance of making appropriate use of the official languages in the activities of the Department of Public Information, seeking to reduce the gap between the use of English and the other five official languages,

Stating that the Secretary-General should continue to enhance the effectiveness of the activities of the Department of Public Information,

Welcoming Armenia and the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya to membership in the Committee on Information,

I. Introduction

1. *Reaffirms* its resolution 13 (I) of 13 February 1946, in which it established the Department of Public Information of the Secretariat, and all other relevant General Assembly resolutions related to the activities of the Department of Public Information;

2. *Calls upon* the Secretary-General, in respect of the public information policies and activities of the United Nations, to continue to implement fully the recommendations contained in paragraph 2 of its resolution 48/44 B of 10 December 1993 and other mandates as established by the General Assembly;

3. *Emphasizes* the importance of the medium-term plan for the period 2002-2005, as approved by the General Assembly in its resolution 55/234, as a guideline that sets out the overall orientation of the public information programme for the Organization's goals through effective communication;

4. *Welcomes* the Millennium Declaration,[9] the ministerial declaration adopted by the Economic and Social Council at the high-level segment of its substantive session of 2000,[10] and the Secretary-General's millennium report,[11] which indicate clearly that there is a great amount of hope and concern in the field of information and communications;

5. *Calls upon* States, in accordance with their laws, to make every effort to prevent the use of the traditional media and new information and communication technologies that undermine legitimate Governments and democracy, fan ethnic strife and xenophobia, incite hatred and violence and contribute to any manifestations of extremism;

6. *Acknowledges* the important work carried out by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and its collaboration with news agencies and broadcasting organizations in developing countries in disseminating information on priority issues;

II. General activities of the Department of Public Information

7. *Reaffirms* that the Department of Public Information is the focal point for information policies of the United Nations and the primary news centre for information about the United Nations and its activities and those of the Secretary-General;

8. *Welcomes* the development of the United Nations News Service by the Department of Public Information, and requests the Secretary-General to continue to exert all efforts to ensure that publications and other information services of the Secretariat, including the United Nations web site and the United Nations News Service, contain comprehensive, objective and equitable information about the issues before the Organization and that they maintain editorial independence, impartiality, accuracy and full consistency with resolutions and decisions of the General Assembly;

9. *Takes note* of the report of the Secretary-General on the reorientation of United Nations activities in the field of public information and communications,[12] encourages him to continue the reorientation exercise, while stressing the need to take into account the views of Member States, and requests him to report thereon to the Committee on Information at its twenty-fourth session;

10. *Emphasizes* that, through its reorientation, the Department of Public Information should maintain and improve its activities in the areas of special interest to developing countries and, where appropriate, other countries with special needs, including countries in transition, and that such reorientation contributes to bridging the existing gap between the developing and the developed countries in the crucial field of public information and communications;

11. *Concurs* with the view of the Secretary-General that development of a strategic vision linking all the components of the Secretariat with emphasis on planning cooperation within the Organization constitutes the central element for continuing

reorientation, and encourages the Department of Public Information to maintain, improve and expand its activities in the areas of special interest to developing countries;

12. *Encourages* the Secretary-General to strengthen the cooperation between the Department of Public Information and other departments of the Secretariat, in particular those dealing with priority issues;

13. *Welcomes* the initiatives that have been taken by the Department of Public Information to strengthen the public information system of the United Nations, and, in this regard, stresses the importance of a coherent and results-oriented approach being undertaken by the United Nations, the specialized agencies and the programmes and funds of the United Nations system involved in public information activities and the provision of resources for their implementation, and that this be done taking into account feedback from Member States on the relevance and effectiveness of its programme delivery;

14. *Requests* the Department of Public Information to continue to ensure the greatest possible access for United Nations guided tours and to ensure that displays in public areas are kept as informative, up-to-date, relevant and as technologically innovative as possible;

15. *Recognizes* the need for the Department of Public Information to increase its outreach activities in all regions, requests the Secretary-General to include, in his next report on the reorientation of United Nations activities in the field of public information and communications, an analysis of the present reach and scope of the Department's activities, identifying the widest possible spectrum of audiences and geographical areas which are not covered adequately and which may require special attention, including the appropriate means of communication, and bearing in mind local language requirements;

III. Multilingualism and public information

16. *Emphasizes* the importance of ensuring the full equitable treatment of all the official languages of the United Nations in all activities of the Department of Public Information, and also stresses the importance of fully implementing its resolution 52/214 of 22 December 1997, in section C of which it requested the Secretary-General to ensure that the texts of all new public documents in all six official languages, and information materials of the United Nations are made available through the United Nations web site daily and are accessible to Member States without delay;

17. *Requests* the Secretary-General to present updated figures on the use and command of all six official languages by the Department of Public Information staff to the Committee on Information at its twenty-fourth session;

18. *Also requests* the Secretary-General to ensure that the Department of Public Information has appropriate staffing capacity in all official languages of the United Nations to undertake all its activities;

19. *Reminds* the Secretary-General of the need to include in future programme budget proposals for the Department of Public Information the importance of using all six official languages in its activities;

20. *Takes note* of the Internet Publishing Guidelines and in this regard requests the Department of Public Information and the Working Group on Internet Matters to include in these guidelines specific recommendations towards achieving the goal of making all documentation on the web sites available in all six official languages of the Organization;

IV. Promotional campaigns

21. *Recalls* its resolutions 53/202 of 17 December 1998 and 54/254 of 15 March 2000, concerning the designation of the fifty-fifth session of the General Assembly as the Millennium Assembly of the United Nations and the convening, as an integral part of the Millennium Assembly, of the Millennium Summit of the United Nations, takes note of the report of the Secretary-General on the millennium promotional campaign,[13] and commends the Department of Public Information for the important role that it played in implementing the promotional campaign;

22. *Appreciates* the Secretary-General's initiatives in promoting 2001 as the United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations and, mindful of the importance of drawing international attention to the impact that dialogue among civilizations could have on promoting mutual understanding, tolerance and peaceful coexistence, encourages the Secretary-General to intensify the promotional campaign through the use of as many broadcasters and languages, in addition to

the official languages, as possible, to spread the coverage, with special emphasis on publicizing the findings of the Group of Eminent Persons for the United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations, and requests the Secretary-General to report thereon to the Committee on Information at its twenty-fourth session;

23. *Recalls* paragraph 10 of General Assembly resolution 55/47 on the International Decade on a Culture of Peace and Non-violence for the Children of the World (2001-2010) and, in this context, encourages the Department of Public Information to undertake specific dissemination of information on a culture of peace, keeping in mind the ongoing Decade;

24. *Recognizes* the need for enhanced publicity through a targeted strategy to be developed by the Department of Public Information on the special sessions and conferences, including on the least developed countries, children, illicit trade in small arms and light weapons, HIV/AIDS, racism, environment, finance for development, sustainable development, ageing, which will address issues crucial to the international community, particularly the developing countries, as well as on the ongoing Second International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism, and requests the Secretary-General to take necessary action in this regard and report to the Committee at its twenty-fourth session in the context of his report on the reorientation of United Nations activities in the field of public information and communications;

25. *Recalls* its resolutions 53/59 B of 3 December 1998 and 54/82 B of 6 December 1999, and urges the Department of Public Information to take the necessary measures, through the provision of relevant and objective information, towards achieving the major objectives set forth in the report of the Secretary-General on the causes of conflict and the promotion of durable peace and sustainable development in Africa,[14] and to publicize the activities of the open-ended working group established for that purpose;

26. *Also recalls* its resolutions concerning the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster, in particular its resolutions 51/138 of 13 December 1996 and 52/172 of 16 December 1997, and encourages the Department of Public Information, in cooperation with the countries concerned and with the relevant organizations and bodies of the United Nations system, to continue to take appropriate measures to enhance world public awareness of the consequences of that disaster;

27. *Further recalls* its resolution 55/44 of 27 November 2000, concerning international cooperation and coordination for the human and ecological rehabilitation of the Semipalatinsk region of Kazakhstan, which has been affected by nuclear tests, and encourages the Department of Public Information, in cooperation with relevant organizations and bodies of the United Nations system, to take appropriate measures to enhance world public awareness of the problems and needs of the Semipalatinsk region;

V. Bridging the digital divide

28. *Commends* the Secretary-General for the establishment of the United Nations Informatic Technology Service, the Health InterNetwork, and the Information and Communications Technology Task Force with a view to bridging the digital divide and as a response to the continuing gulf between developed and developing countries, welcomes the contribution of the Department of Public Information in publicizing the efforts of the Secretary-General in closing the digital divide as a means of spurring economic growth and as a response to the continuing gulf between developed and developing countries and, in this context, requests the Department further to enhance its role;

VI. United Nations information centres

29. *Stresses* that the United Nations information centres and information components should continue to play a significant role in disseminating information about the work of the Organization to the peoples of the world, in particular in the areas of economic and social development;

30. *Takes note* of the report of the Secretary-General entitled "Integration of United Nations information centres with field offices of the United Nations Development Programme: implementation of the views of host Governments",[15] welcomes the action taken by the Department of Public Information to implement the views of those host Governments as expressed in their replies to the questionnaire provided by the Secretariat, and requests the Secretary-General to take the necessary steps for the continued implementation of those views and report thereon to

the Committee on Information at its twenty-fourth session;

31. *Requests* the Secretary-General to report to the Committee on Information at its twenty-fourth session on any possible proposal to continue, if feasible and on a case-by-case basis, the integration policy in a cost-effective manner, while maintaining the operational and functional independence of United Nations information centres, taking into account the views of the host countries to ensure that the information functions and the autonomy of United Nations information centres are not adversely affected, to meet the policy's stated objective of improving the provision of information by the United Nations;

32. *Also requests* the Secretary-General to include in his report on the reorientation of United Nations activities in the field of public information and communications, to be submitted to the Committee on Information at its twenty-fourth session, information on the involvement of the Department of Public Information in the context of the implementation of his recommendations on the establishment of United Nations houses;

33. *Takes note* of the report of the Secretary-General on the equitable disbursement of resources to United Nations information centres,[16] emphasizes that further efforts are needed to ensure the most equitable disbursement possible of resources to United Nations information centres, and stresses that particular attention should be paid to the concerns of developing countries and, where appropriate, other countries with special needs, including countries in transition;

34. *Emphasizes* that the United Nations information centres, as the "field voice" of the Department of Public Information, should promote public awareness and mobilize support for the work of the United Nations at the local level, and recognizes the appeal made by the Secretary-General to the host Governments of United Nations information centres to facilitate the work of the centres in their countries by the provision of rent-free or rent-subsidized office space, while taking into account the economic condition of the host Governments and bearing in mind that such support should not be a substitute for the full allocation of financial requirements for the United Nations information centres in the context of the programme budget of the United Nations;

35. *Reaffirms* that the United Nations information centres should continue to publicize United Nations activities and accomplishments in the areas of economic and social development, poverty eradication, debt relief, health, education, elimination of illiteracy, women's rights, children's rights, the plight of children in armed conflict, the sexual exploitation of children, the eradication of drug trafficking, environmental issues, peace and security, and other relevant issues;

36. *Also reaffirms* the role of the General Assembly in relation to the opening of new United Nations information centres, invites the Secretary-General to make such recommendations as he may consider necessary regarding the establishment and location of such centres, and, in this regard, welcomes the requests by Croatia, Gabon, Guinea, Haiti, Jamaica and Kyrgyzstan for information centres or information components;

37. *Takes note* of the efforts by some United Nations information centres to develop their own web pages in local languages, and, in this respect, encourages the Department of Public Information to provide resources and technical facilities, in particular to United Nations information centres whose web pages are not yet operational, to develop web pages in the respective local languages of their host countries, and encourages host Governments to respond to the needs of United Nations information centres;

VII. Role of the Department of Public Information in United Nations peacekeeping

38. *Takes note with appreciation* of the efforts of the Secretary-General to strengthen the public information capacity of the Department of Public Information for the establishment and day-to-day functioning of the information components of peacekeeping and other field operations of the United Nations, and requests the Secretariat to continue to ensure the involvement of the Department from the planning stage of such future operations through interdepartmental consultations and coordination with other departments of the Secretariat, in particular with the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, and to report thereon to the Committee on Information at its twenty-fourth session in 2002, including any possible proposals for enhancing the role of the Department in this regard;

39. *Notes* the ongoing discussion on the report of the Secretary-General on resource requirements for implementation of the report of the Panel on United Nations Peace Operations,[17] and in this regard stresses that the Department of Public Information should continue its efforts to strengthen its capacity to significantly contribute to the functioning of information components in United Nations peacekeeping operations and requests the Secretary-General to report to the Committee on Information at its twenty-fourth session in the report requested in paragraph 38 above;

40. *Stresses* the importance of enhancing the public information capacity of the Department of Public Information in the field of peacekeeping operations and its role in the selection process of spokespersons for United Nations peacekeeping operations or missions, and, in this regard, encourages the Department to second spokespersons who have the necessary skills to fulfil the tasks of the operations or missions, and to consider views expressed, especially by host countries, when appropriate, in this regard;

VIII. Dag Hammarskjöld Library

41. *Takes note* of the continuing efforts of the Secretary-General to make the Dag Hammarskjöld Library a virtual library with world outreach, making United Nations information and other acquired materials accessible electronically to a growing number of readers and users, and, at the same time, requests him to enrich on a multilingual basis the stock of books and journals in the Library, including publications on peace and security and development-related issues, to ensure that the Library continues to be a broadly accessible resource for information about the United Nations and its activities;

42. *Encourages* the Library to alert its clientele, including Member States through their missions, for example, via electronic mail, of any new publications and collections;

43. *Welcomes* the training courses conducted by the Dag Hammarskjöld Library for the representatives of Member States and Secretariat staff on Cyberseek, web search, the Intranet, United Nations documentation, UN-I-QUE, and the optical disk system, and in that regard encourages the Library to further develop such courses;

44. *Also welcomes* the role of the Department in fostering increased collaboration among libraries of the United Nations system, particularly in establishing one central system-wide online catalogue that will allow for the searching of the bibliographic records of all print holdings of all United Nations system libraries and the searching of all electronic holdings and electronic databases maintained by all United Nations system libraries, and requests the Secretary-General to report thereon to the Committee on Information at its twenty-fourth session in the context of his report on the reorientation of United Nations activities in the field of public information and communications;

45. *Requests* the Department of Public Information to ensure the continued development of the integrated library system in the Dag Hammarskjöld Library, and requests the Secretary-General to report thereon to the Committee on Information at its twenty-fourth session in the context of his report on the reorientation of United Nations activities in the field of public information and communications;

IX. Traditional means of communication: radio, television and publications

46. *Welcomes* the progress report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the pilot project on the development of an international radio broadcasting capacity for the United Nations,[18] and also welcomes the extensive network of partnerships established with local, regional and national broadcasters in Member States, and concurs with the Secretary-General that the implementation of the project has been one of the more successful examples of the reorientation of the Department of Public Information;

47. *Requests* the Secretary-General to submit to the Committee on Information a final report on the results of the pilot project by August 2001, and expresses its intention to take a final decision on the mandate and allocation of the necessary resources for the establishment of a permanent international radio broadcasting capacity for the United Nations during the main part of its fifty-sixth session and, in this regard, requests the Department to ensure the continued implementation of the project through 31 December 2001;

48. *Stresses* that radio remains one of the most cost-effective and far-reaching traditional media

available to the Department of Public Information and an important instrument in United Nations activities, such as development and peacekeeping, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 48/44 B;

49. *Takes note* of the efforts under way by the Department of Public Information to disseminate programmes directly to broadcasting stations all over the world in the six official languages as well as in other languages, and, in that regard, stresses the need for impartiality and objectivity concerning information activities of the United Nations;

50. *Requests* the Department of Public Information, in view of the need for efficiency, and a wider dissemination of information services of the United Nations Radio, to enhance where necessary the use of non-official languages to meet the information needs of its audiences;

51. *Encourages* the Department of Public Information to continue to include in its radio and television programming specific programmes addressing the needs of developing nations;

52. *Expresses* its appreciation to the Department of Public Information for the ongoing programme for broadcasters and journalists from developing countries and countries in transition, and calls for its further continuation along the lines of its current implementation, while including a larger number of trainees from those countries;

53. *Emphasizes* that all publications of the Department of Public Information, in accordance with existing mandates, should fulfil an identifiable need, should not duplicate other publications of the United Nations system and should be produced in a cost-effective manner;

X. United Nations web site

54. *Notes*, while appreciating current efforts, that there is a need for the Secretary-General to continue to develop proposals for the multilingual development, maintenance and enrichment of the United Nations web site in order to ultimately lead to achieving full parity among the official languages of the United Nations, and requests him to report thereon to the Committee on Information at its twenty-fourth session;

55. *Requests* the Secretary-General in the meantime and until it has taken a decision on the proposals to be presented for the multilingual development, maintenance and enrichment of the United Nations web site, to ensure, to the extent possible, while maintaining an up-to-date and accurate web site, the equitable distribution of financial and human resources within the Department of Public Information allocated to the United Nations web site among all official languages on a continuous basis;

56. *Requests* the Department of Public Information, as the manager of the Organization's web site, to take the lead in developing a proposal for the establishment of one central Internet portal that will encompass all web sites of the United Nations system, preferably through system-wide cooperation, and that will allow for the search and retrieval of information from all web sites in the United Nations system from one central search facility, and requests the Secretary-General to report thereon to the Committee on Information at its twenty-fourth session in the context of his report on the reorientation of United Nations activities in the field of public information and communications;

57. *Stresses* the importance of access to United Nations Treaty Collection and United Nations parliamentary documentation for the public;

58. *Commends* the efforts of the Information Technology Services Division of the Office of Central Support Services in ensuring that the required technological infrastructure is in place to accommodate the imminent linkage of the optical disk system to the United Nations web site;

59. *Recognizes* the far-reaching impact that the linking of the optical disk system with the United Nations web site will have in furthering the goals of the Organization by making all parliamentary documents in the six official languages publicly available, and stresses that the integration of the optical disk system with the United Nations web site will represent one of the steps towards significantly enhancing the multilingual nature of the United Nations web site and will lead to efficiencies in all Secretariat departments;

60. *Takes note* with interest of the electronic mail-based news alert service distributed worldwide by the Department of Public Information, and emphasizes that extra care needs to be taken to ensure that news breaking stories and news alerts are accurate, impartial and free of any bias;

61. *Encourages* the Secretary-General, through the Department of Public Information, to continue to take full advantage of recent developments in information technology, including the Internet, in order to improve, in a cost-effective manner, the expeditious dissemination of information on the United Nations, in accordance with the priorities established by the General Assembly and taking into account the linguistic diversity of the Organization;

62. *Encourages* an increase in the number of programmes of United Nations Radio, in all available languages, on the United Nations web site;

XI. Final remarks

63. *Recognizes* the need for constructive interaction between the management of the Department of Public Information and members of the Committee on Information, and requests the Department of Public Information to arrange, in consultation with the Chairman, informal meetings with the members of the Committee every three months to discuss the ongoing work of the Department, and in this regard requests the Department, in preparation for these meetings, to invite members of the Committee, no later than two weeks prior to their convening, to propose topics for discussion;

64. *Requests* the Secretary-General to report to the Committee on Information at its twenty-fourth session and to the General Assembly at its fifty-seventh session on the activities of the Department of Public Information and on the implementation of the recommendations contained in the present resolution;

65. *Requests* the Committee on Information to report to the General Assembly at its fifty-seventh session;

66. *Decides* to include in the provisional agenda of its fifty-seventh session the item entitled "Questions relating to information".

Draft decision
Increase in the membership of the Committee on Information

The General Assembly decides to increase the membership of the Committee on Information from 96 to 98, and to appoint Azerbaijan and Monaco as members of the Committee on Information.

71. Closing statements were made by the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran, on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, as well as by the representatives of Mexico and Portugal, and by the Interim Head of the Department of Public Information.

72. The Chairman noted that the Committee would resume its session during the first week of September 2001 to consider the final report of the Secretary-General on the results of the implementation of the pilot project on the development of an international radio broadcasting capacity for the United Nations and finalize its recommendations to the General Assembly at its fifty-sixth session.

Notes

[1] *Official Records of the General Assembly, Thirty-fifth Session, Supplement No. 21* (A/35/21), annex, sect. V.

[2] Ibid., *Thirty-sixth Session, Supplement No. 21* (A/36/21); ibid., *Thirty-seventh Session, Supplement No. 21* and corrigendum (A/37/21 and Corr.1); ibid., *Thirty-eighth Session, Supplement No. 21* and corrigenda (A/38/21 and Corr.1 and 2); ibid., *Thirty-ninth Session, Supplement No. 21* (A/39/21); ibid., *Fortieth Session, Supplement No. 21* (A/40/21); ibid., *Forty-first Session, Supplement No. 21* (A/41/21); ibid., *Forty-second Session, Supplement No. 21* (A/42/21); ibid., *Forty-third Session, Supplement No. 21* (A/43/21); ibid., *Forty-fourth Session, Supplement No. 21* (A/44/21); ibid., *Forty-fifth Session, Supplement No. 21* (A/45/21); ibid., *Forty-sixth Session, Supplement No. 21* (A/46/21); ibid., *Forty-seventh Session, Supplement No. 21* (A/47/21); ibid., *Forty-eighth Session, Supplement No. 21* (A/48/21); ibid., *Forty-ninth Session, Supplement No. 21* (A/49/21); ibid., *Fiftieth Session, Supplement No. 21* (A/50/21); and ibid., *Fifty-first Session, Supplement No. 21* (A/51/21).

[3] Ibid., *Fifty-second Session, Supplement No. 21* (A/52/21/Rev.1).

[4] Ibid., *Fifty-third Session, Supplement No. 21* (A/53/21/Rev.1).

[5] Ibid., *Fifty-fourth Session, Supplement No. 21* and addendum (A/54/21 and Add.1).

[6] Ibid., *Fifty-fifth Session, Supplement No. 21* (A/55/21).

[7] A/55/452.

[8] See United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, *Records of the General Conference, Twenty-first Session, Belgrade, 23 September to 28 October 1980*, vol. 1, *Resolutions*, sect. III.4, resolution 4/21.

[9] Resolution 55/2.

[10] See *Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-fifth Session, Supplement No. 3* (A/55/3), chap. III, para. 17.

[11] A/54/2000.

[12] A/AC.198/2001/2.

[13] A/AC.198/2000/10.

[14] A/52/871.

[15] A/AC.198/2001/4.

[16] A/AC.198/2001/5.

[17] A/55/507 and Add.1.

[18] A/AC.198/2001/7.

Annex I

Statement by the Chairman of the Committee on Information at the opening of the twenty-third session of the Committee, held on 30 April 2001

1. First of all, I wish to express once again my sincere gratitude for the trust that you have placed in me by electing me as Chairman of the Committee on Information for this year and 2002. The members of the newly elected Bureau wish to assure the Committee that they will, with the support of Mr. Shashi Tharoor and the Department of Public Information, make every effort to ensure that the work of this session of the Committee is at a level commensurate with the historic period that the United Nations is currently experiencing.

2. The twenty-third session of the Committee on Information is beginning at a crucial time since we are entering a new phase in the work of the Organization. The historic summit meeting held in September 2000 marked the end of an era, the cold war era. The round-table session on 7 September 2000, which the President of my country, Hugo Chávez, had the honour of coordinating, was an exceptional event thanks to the participation of heads of State and Government from all over the world, who agreed on the need for change at the United Nations. At that same meeting, the Venezuelan President wisely emphasized that we cannot begin to face the challenges of the twenty-first century while playing by the same rules that were in effect half a century ago at the end of the Second World War.

3. The world's greatest leaders responded to the challenge of adopting the Millennium Declaration, showing with the utmost clarity the path that the Organization must follow in order to adapt to the needs of the twenty-first century.

4. That mandate involves giving top priority to combating poverty, discrimination, hunger and, in general, all forms of domination. In our "global village", it is increasingly unacceptable that the prosperity of a privileged minority should be founded upon the poverty and premature deaths of the most vulnerable people. Globalization must become a positive force for the entire human person and for all people. It must achieve well-being for all mankind. Accordingly, the highly concrete and humane goals embodied in the Millennium Declaration, especially all that relates to combating poverty, open up opportunities and prospects for a phase during which the international community can move forward with its actions based on the necessary linkages between equity and worldwide social justice, putting into effect the principle of solidarity which is imperative for building the new society of tomorrow.

5. There is tangible evidence that we are on the right track. In support of this affirmation, I should merely like to draw attention to the meeting to be held tomorrow, in a room adjoining this one, where the Economic and Social Council and the Bretton Woods institutions will come together to design a new worldwide financial architecture which will be based on the social issues which were stressed by our heads of State at the Millennium Summit, and not merely on economic and commercial profit.

6. The background to this twenty-third session is marked by the extraordinary information revolution we are currently experiencing. We are living in the era of generalized and instantaneous communication. Despite this, only five per cent of mankind has Internet access. That five per cent is concentrated in the industrialized countries, but we should support the efforts that the countries in the South are trying to make in order to achieve ever-greater access to new information technologies.

7. The Economic and Social Council must intensify its efforts to ensure that those modern information technologies speed up the economic development of the poor countries. Our Committee must devote its energy to enable the Department of Public Information to direct that process of change, which it will promote by means of its capacity for transformation.

8. Another priority task of the Committee on Information is to spread the message of the United Nations throughout the world, acting as the voice of the Organization. The United Nations needs the support of world public opinion; and for this, it requires a vibrant and dynamic Department of Public Information, able to make full use of all the traditional media as well as the latest "online" communication technologies.

9. In 1997, at the beginning of his first mandate, Secretary-General Kofi Annan gave priority to that issue when he created the "culture of communication" within the Organization.

10. Mr. Tharoor, you have taken an active part in that reorientation; you were formerly Director of Communications and Special Projects in the Executive Office of the Secretary-General, projecting the image of an Organization committed to change; now once again, as the Interim Head of the Department, it is your role to capitalize on the efforts which were initiated previously and to project them at the level of the United Nations as a whole.

11. The Secretary-General's commitment to promoting communication should encourage us to strive more and more to improve communication mechanisms, since this is the only way that we shall be able to build a participatory democracy at the global level, a vital element in order to change obsolete structures.

12. A new challenge will face the Committee on Information on 3 May 2001 with the holding of World Press Freedom Day. On that occasion the Secretary-General will make a statement on the important topic of press freedom. It will also be an opportunity for the Committee on Information, through its Chairman, to reaffirm the new dynamic inspired by the Millennium Declaration principles, particularly the right of the media to play their vital role and the right of the public to obtain the necessary reliable information.

13. Thanks to the renewed support of the Secretary-General and the President of the General Assembly, we must continue to strengthen the activities of the Department of Public Information in order to mobilize the peoples of the world behind the United Nations in its new commitment and at the same time to project its basic values, which arise out of the Charter of the United Nations.

14. To facilitate our discussions, eight reports by the Secretary-General on different aspects of the Department's work have been submitted to the Committee. I should like to offer particular congratulations to the Department, which, under the direction of Mr. Tharoor, provided this documentation to us, distributing it a month in advance, thereby giving us the necessary time to study it.

15. On the basis of that documentation, and inspired as we all are by our commitment to realizing the goals of the Millennium Declaration aimed at strengthening the new role of the United Nations, I am convinced, as I pointed out at the outset, that this session is vitally important and will be constructive and innovative.

16. I am also convinced that the spirit by which we should be guided is the same which marked and inspired the work of the Millennium Summit. The Bureau of the Committee will make every effort to facilitate the work of this session and support your efforts in this worthy task of planning and action. I also hope to maintain a constructive and fruitful dialogue with the Department over the coming two years.

17. In that spirit, I invite both the Bureau and delegations to play an active part in this new approach, which will enable the Department to accomplish its worthy task of informing, planning, and carrying out the wishes of the new world which is coming into being.

Annex II

Statement by the Interim Head of the Department of Public Information at the opening of the twenty-third session of the Committee on Information, held on 30 April 2001

1. It is a great pleasure and an honour for me to address the Committee on Information as it begins its twenty-third session. As you are aware, the Secretary-General has asked me to serve as the Interim Head of the Department of Public Information, following the departure of my distinguished predecessor, Under-Secretary-General Kensaku Hogen. I know that you join me in expressing appreciation for Mr. Hogen's leadership of the Department of Public Information. We shall all benefit from the excellent work that he did during his three years in the post.

2. I wish to take this opportunity to congratulate the newly elected Chairman, His Excellency Mr. Milos Alcalay, and the members of the Bureau. I have every confidence that under Ambassador Alcalay's able guidance, the Committee will make even more progress towards helping the Department accomplish its important mission. I would like to thank the Ambassador for the kind words addressed to me. My colleagues in the Department of Public Information and I very much look forward to working with the Committee, its Bureau, and you, Sir, to help make this a productive session. Allow me also to pay tribute to the outgoing Chairman, Mr. Elhassane Zahid, as well as to the other members of the Bureau for their efforts on behalf of the Department of Public Information, which have led to the further strengthening of the spirit of cooperation between the Committee and the Department in pursuit of our common objectives.

3. I would like first to inform the Committee that, in observance of World Press Freedom Day on 3 May, the Department of Public Information is organizing an event with the theme "Fighting racism and promoting diversity: the role of the free press" at 10 a.m. in this conference room. The observance has been planned to coincide with this session of the Committee on Information, and as the Chairman has just informed you, the Secretary-General will address it. I have invited the Chairman of the Committee to address the observance, and would like to invite all of you to attend.

4. Last year, the Committee took the initiative to revise its agenda, by adding a new item, which allowed for an in-depth consideration of the Secretary-General's reports before it. I believe we can all agree that this was most useful, in that it provided a good opportunity for more discussion of the issues between the Committee and the Department. I am told that the past session was characterized by an excellent cooperative relationship among delegations, and I believe that, overall, there was a more positive assessment by Member States of the work of the Department, for which we are both grateful and encouraged. I trust that this year's session will generate the same kind of innovation and support, allowing us to work together closely to spread the message of the United Nations with more vigour and purpose.

5. For my part, with your support and guidance, I will strive to improve the Department's efficiency and outreach with the objective of "energizing", rather than restructuring, our work. I have made a modest beginning in this direction over the last three months and I look forward to achieving further progress in the months ahead. When I began my assignment in the Department of Public Information, I convened a "town hall" meeting to talk with all the staff of the Department, and have also visited virtually every one of them in their offices, to see how the work of this Department is being done. From what I have seen, I believe that the Department should be proud of what it is achieving in the face of limited resources, especially in relation to the proliferation of mandated priorities, which make up the Organization's work programme.

6. An overview of the wide range of the activities of the Department of Public Information is included in the comprehensive report of the Secretary-General entitled "Reorientation of United Nations activities in the field of public information and communications" (A/AC.198/2001/2), which you have before you at this session. In it, we have highlighted our most recent efforts to further develop the conceptual framework and operational priorities for the reorientation of United Nations information and communications policies, aiming to develop a culture of

communications throughout the Organization. Seven other reports have also been prepared, as called for by the General Assembly, on specific subjects such as the innovative pilot radio project, the ongoing work of the United Nations information centres, the United Nations web site and the information campaign for the United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations. These reports were all available well in advance of our session this year, and I trust they will be particularly useful in your deliberations, as they offer a detailed picture of the Department's day-to-day activities at Headquarters and in the field, in some of the main areas of our work.

7. Allow me to briefly outline what we believe to be our principal mission, and to highlight some of our current priorities, both for 2001 and beyond.

8. The primary objective of the Department's public information programme — to build broad-based global support for the work of the United Nations — goes back to General Assembly resolution 13 (I) of 1946 and again, is clearly articulated in the medium-term plan for the period 2002-2005, approved by the General Assembly this past December.

9. The Millennium Summit and Assembly have reaffirmed that the United Nations is "the indispensable common house of the entire human family". The world's leaders have called for the Organization to live up to the faith being placed in it by achieving clear and measurable results. At the same time, the Secretary-General has underscored, and certainly everyone in this room would agree, that the challenges and substantive goals of the United Nations cannot be attained without garnering public support for the Organization through our efforts to create an "informed understanding" of the Organization's work and purposes. How can we possibly hope to succeed with our global campaign to eradicate poverty, for instance, without mobilizing public support, both in donor countries and among the poor? How can United Nations peacekeeping efforts be successful without an accompanying information programme, including in the mission area, to explain to people what we are trying to do?

10. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, the communications revolution has opened up enormous possibilities for the Department of Public Information. This is especially important to our priority effort to provide developing countries with immediate access to news developments from the United Nations worldwide. At the heart of this effort are our daily 15-minute news bulletins in the six official languages which, since September, are being broadcast by hundreds of radio stations. In addition, building on our very popular United Nations News Centre on the web site, we will soon launch a regionally oriented news service which will carry news of United Nations developments directly to thousands of journalists in every region of the world. I should also mention that, as part of this effort to reach journalists in developing countries, we have also initiated a series of high-level briefing programmes with the generous support of the Government of Japan. Fifteen journalists from Africa participated in the first such programme last year, and another 15 from Asia will be here later this month.

11. We can now provide news of the Organization to every corner of the world in an instant. We have the will and the expertise to do this, but a financial investment will need to be made if we are indeed serious about modernizing our communications infrastructure.

12. I do believe it is useful to look at the work of the Department with a fresh eye, and I am doing that. At the same time, I want to stress that the Secretary-General has not sent me to the Department of Public Information to wield an axe. I am struck by the fact that the Department has lost 103 posts since the biennium 1992-1993 — over 12 per cent of its total strength. At the same time, the Department has been asked to do more, and despite the reduction in staff, we are delivering. I believe we must now focus on what the Department of Public Information must do, how it must do it, and with what resources.

13. The Department of Public Information will continue to disseminate timely, comprehensive, balanced and reliable information through print, audio-visual and Internet media, and to maintain a world-class library system. We are developing effective advocacy campaigns in support of General Assembly objectives. We will partner with the agencies and programmes of the United Nations system, and with key redisseminators, including the media and civil society, including non-governmental organizations, educational institutions and the private sector. A key example of this approach is the "The UN works" programme, developed by the Department, to demonstrate to people around the world how the Organization is working to help solve the problems of the twenty-first century, in particular those relating to

economic and social development. And, of course, we have this programme on the web site as well.

14. To enhance the lines of communication and help circulate ideas freely within the Department, I have created a "senior leadership team", composed of our Directors and other senior staff, who meet every day in my office to formulate strategies and exchange information. At the same time, the Department is actively collaborating with many other areas of the United Nations. First and foremost, we work with the other substantive departments in the Secretariat, both at Headquarters, and at the United Nations offices in Geneva, Nairobi and Vienna on a daily basis to further develop our "client orientation" and help them formulate their messages in order to realize their mandates. This coordination is a very high priority of the Secretary-General, and consequently, I have continued to convene the Communications Group, which regularly brings to the table United Nations system colleagues tasked with communicating the United Nations story to the outside world. The Department is in contact continually with these system partners to maximize outreach, avoid duplication, and better focus the Organization's message. As indicated in the report of the Secretary-General on the activities of the Joint United Nations Information Committee in 2000 (A/AC.198/2001/9), the Department will continue to play an active role within this Committee, especially this year when this subsidiary organ of the Administrative Committee on Coordination is reviewing its processes with a view to strengthening capacities for inter-agency dialogue.

15. I can assure the members of this Committee that we are continuing to respond to the General Assembly's call to maintain and improve our activities in the areas of special needs to developing countries, as, for example, in the work of our information centres, in the strengthened media outreach and training programmes for the media from developing countries, and through the Internet-related training seminars we organize.

16. In addition, to cover the work of the main organs of the United Nations, the Department is publicizing seven major international conferences and special sessions of the General Assembly to take place this year. The objective will be to demonstrate that these are not "talk fests", but action-oriented gatherings which will provide tangible results for the world's people. The Department is, for example, taking a very proactive role in the Third International Conference on the Least Developed Countries, being held in May in Brussels. However, I must point out that additional resources will be necessary to effectively carry out the information campaigns for these conferences and special sessions. We are giving this matter priority attention and count on your support as we seek the required funding.

17. The Department began to reorient its work over four years ago, and we have made real progress towards creating a culture of communications within the Organization. As to the future, and the next biennium, the Department will use as its road map the medium-term plan, which was the basis for our submission to the programme budget for the biennium 2002-2003. We will make a conference room paper outlining the programmatic aspects of this submission available to the Committee during this session. I have taken small steps to adjust the allocation of staff resources within the Department and will constantly be on the lookout for opportunities to rationalize our staffing and put resources where they are most needed. I have also insisted on efficiency and accountability in our daily work. I am pleased to say that the staff of the Department have responded very positively. I hope to hold a second meeting with all the staff of the Department following the conclusion of this Committee's session to share with them your sense of how the Department is doing and where it should be going.

18. The challenge now for the Department of Public Information is to translate "reorientation" into "modernization" — in other words how to translate a "process" and an "approach" into a detailed blueprint for better serving the "We the peoples" of the Charter of the United Nations in the twenty-first century. The Department will work to ensure that the information and communications function will continue to be placed at the heart of the strategic management of the Organization and that the imperative of communications infuses the Organization's policy-making. The Secretary-General has already invited me to address his Senior Management Group at the end of May, following the conclusion of this Committee's deliberations, on the "information challenge". We will draw from the past to document and disseminate accurate and timely information about United Nations achievements, experiences and lessons learned. At the same time, we will reflect the present, to provide

timely news and spread the words and images of the Organization, using the best available technology. The Department will also look at the future, to foster an awareness of the global challenges to the peace and well-being of our world, as well as to the role the United Nations can play in making it a better place for the generations to come.

19. We will continue to work, I assure you, to project an open, transparent Organization, which the Secretary-General has worked hard to achieve, and which is a change now being recognized by many members of the world press.

20. The Department's embracing of new technology in all areas of its work will become even more critical to its success in the future. The overall goal is to develop an infrastructure capable of developing instantaneous transmission of text, image, and voice messages from the Organization to the world at large. The Department will continue to work to strengthen the United Nations web site as a major communications tool to enable hundreds of millions of people to directly access information about the United Nations. In this connection, guidelines will soon be officially issued as an administrative instruction, which will help coordinate this Internet effort, as called for by this Committee. Photocopies of the text of these guidelines are available in the back of the conference room. Furthermore, Committee members have traditionally praised the resources and services of the Dag Hammarskjöld Library, and I would like to assure you that these will continue and be enhanced for Member States as well as for other users of the Library.

21. However, I would like to assure you that our increased use of electronic media will not be at the expense of the traditional means of dissemination. We have taken good note of your statement this morning regarding the bridging of the digital divide. Our publications programme will remain vital, and multilingual, resources permitting. Likewise, library resources in print formats will also be acquired, to meet the needs of Member States and staff. Strides will continue to be made in radio broadcasting, clear evidence of which is the success of the pilot project for direct international radio broadcasting, as outlined in the Secretary-General's progress report on the implementation of the pilot project on the development of an international radio broadcasting capacity for the United Nations (A/AC.198/2001/7).

22. Our information centres, services and United Nations offices will continue to present the work and achievements of the United Nations to local audiences around the world, and their means of outreach will continue to be creative and diversified, based on their knowledge gained in their respective areas, and local needs.

23. The Department will continue to face challenges regarding resource availability and resource allocation. The Department of Public Information represents 5 per cent of the United Nations budget, with 428 staff at Headquarters and 307 in the field. It is one of the larger Departments of the Secretariat and, like any administrative entity, there must be periodic self-assessment, evaluation, and fine-tuning to maximize use of our staff and programme resources as part of a results-oriented approach. We will strive to focus our work as sharply as possible, so that we do not "spread ourselves too thin", thereby reducing the impact of the United Nations message. We will strive to ensure that there is efficiency and no waste. To accomplish this, we must have clear mandates to work with. With the help of the Committee on Information, we will be able to better prioritize the competing items on our work programme.

24. You will have noticed that, in his report on the equitable disbursement of resources to United Nations information centres (A/AC.198/2001/5), the General Assembly appeals to Member States to provide rent-free or rent-subsidized office space for United Nations information centres in developed countries, and to assist through cash contributions for information services. The proportion of our resources being spent on rent in the developed world has become unconscionable. I would hope that the Committee will endorse this request of the Secretary-General, and that the Member States concerned will see their way to easing this burden on our slender resources. Any savings resulting from such an exercise can be directed to improve the quality and reach of the services we provide in developing countries. Using the report I mentioned above as a foundation on which to build, I also intend to carefully review the overall allocation of resources to United Nations information centres, as requested by the General Assembly, with a view to maximizing the effectiveness of those offices, while maintaining, in particular, their reach in the developing world. Once again, I look forward to the support of Member States in this regard.

25. The Department's goal is to live up to its familiar initials, if I may challenge some of our interpreters here — DPI — through making a difference by promoting the United Nations and influencing world opinion. We will be dynamic in our work, pro-active in our methods, and interesting in our outputs. I believe that we are on the right track. However, in the wise words of the American humorist, Will Rogers, "Even if you're on the right track, you'll get run over if you just sit there". I can assure you that the Department of Public Information is not "just sitting there" and, with the Committee's views to give us guidance and hold us to the highest standards, we will move ahead rapidly on the right track.

26. I look forward to hearing the views and receiving the guidance of the distinguished members of this Committee under your able leadership.

Annex III

Statement by the Chairman of the Committee on Information on the occasion of the commemoration of World Press Freedom Day, being held under the theme "Fighting Racism and Promoting Diversity: The Role of the Free Press", held in New York on 3 May 2001

1. The United Nations Committee on Information has devoted an annual day to reaffirming its commitment to commemorating World Press Freedom Day every year since the Day was proclaimed by the General Assembly in 1993. This year, however, that celebration is of very special significance. On the one hand, the presence of the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, reflects the importance that he attaches to our annual meeting, at which the 96 member States of the Committee show their firm and determined commitment to a free, pluralistic and independent press, a basic condition for enhancing participatory democracy which helps to provide information depicting a world that is experiencing profound social, technological, institutional, economic and political changes. Such changes are certainly beneficial for the United Nations, which is committed to the spirit proposed by the heads of State at the Millennium Summit.

2. Mr. Secretary-General, let me also assure you that the content of your excellent statement and your innovative vision will be a source of inspiration and motivation for the conduct of our work in the Committee.

3. I also wish to thank the President of the General Assembly for his message and his constant support for this Committee, which makes an effective contribution in the area of information to the strengthening of the Committee as a subsidiary organ of the General Assembly.

4. I take this opportunity to welcome the presence of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), represented by its Deputy Director-General. The leading role played by UNESCO at these meetings reflects its strong support for the campaign to create a new world information order, an idea which was first raised within UNESCO 20 years ago and today is more vital than ever.

5. The Committee on Information must support technological programmes aimed at improving the effectiveness of both public and private media, particularly in the developing countries. That will enable us to fulfil the projected goal of defining new objectives of solidarity, transformation and concrete action for the twenty-first century.

6. However, it is not just a matter of making use of the tools currently offered to us by the progress of the technological revolution in information; we must ensure that they are used in order to promote content that is appropriate to the historical context. This demonstrates the wisdom of choosing the theme selected for these meetings promoting press freedom as a means of fighting racism and as a way to defend diversity.

7. Freedom of expression and press freedom are two essential tools for combating racism and all forms of intolerance, the central theme of these meetings, which we are commemorating today, 3 May, as we have every year since the Day was proclaimed a decade ago. Thanks to the universal and ethical stature and commitment to solidarity on the part of the leading figures who brought the United Nations into being in 1945, freedom of expression and press freedom have been successfully projected as essential conditions defining the irreversible progress towards the goal of building a society of hope in the post-war period in order to complete the second half of the twentieth century. The inspiration with humanist thought provided by figures of universal stature such as Mahatma Gandhi, the apostle of non-violence, demonstrated that freedom of expression was a non-violent way to carry forward the just struggle of the people. Freedom of expression is also the best liberating instrument for putting forward the demands of minorities, as demonstrated by the triumph achieved by civil rights movements and the positive results that we now see, thanks to the sacrifices and the combative vision of men of the stature of Martin Luther King. To him, in his fight against racism, I pay a heartfelt tribute

of admiration and gratitude on this day dedicated to freedom of expression.

8. In 1945, together with other great statesmen, such visionaries rejected the injustice and destruction caused by the Second World War, and showed that freedom of expression is the best weapon against domination, oppression and racism. It is in that context that journalists must once again play the central part in raising public awareness and promoting a culture of peace in a world which is playing by a new set of rules.

9. Today, just as in 1945, we are at a similar historical crossroad, since the imbalance resulting from the collapse of a dying world obliges us to choose a direction for the new world coming into being. The World Conference against Racism will be held this year in Durban, South Africa, a country where we must certainly remember another leader of the vanguard, Nelson Mandela, who succeeded in bringing about the downfall of apartheid and racial segregation, promoting the birth of a society based on dialogue, reconciliation and tolerance.

10. A free press played a crucial role in all the aforementioned examples by projecting news throughout the world and giving it the necessary popular impetus in order to realize the noble ideals of freedom and democracy.

11. The Committee on Information must help to ensure that information is at the service of mankind. However, given the disparities between developed and developing countries and their consequences for the capacities of the communication media in the countries of the South, our efforts have to be directed towards enabling those countries to make their voices heard using the latest audio-visual tools. Just as 50 years ago, we have to fight against injustice, and that fight is now the struggle against poverty, disease, unemployment and all the negative values of domination. High levels of illiteracy, lack of infrastructure and limited access to modern telecommunications technology do not help in implementing with greater mutual understanding the proposals which were set out with such clarity and determination at the Millennium Summit. This is the challenge facing us: to succeed in fulfilling the historic commitment defined by the heads of State in order to achieve integrated development for mankind.

12. I should like to paraphrase the nineteenth-century French thinker Lacordaire, who said that between the rich and the poor, it is freedom that oppresses and the law that liberates, by stating today that between the rich and the poor, it is solidarity that liberates. The United Nations has a central part to play, and should emphasize the importance of the didactic role of the social communication media in order to ensure that the projection of the idea of change should be transmitted as the expression of the numerous activities of this Organization, which is committed to building a better world for our children and our children's children.

13. The international community has the means to transform words into actions and projects into positive results for the great marginalized majorities. Let us dedicate ourselves to working together to achieve those goals, which are none other than freedom and solidarity. They can be attained only with the support of a press that is free but also aware of its responsibility in combining three closely interrelated factors: technology, ethics and a social commitment to reliable information which must be provided by the media as their contribution to the creation of a more just and more humane world, to which the peoples of the world aspire.

14. Long live the free press in its fight against racism and its defence of freedom!

Annex IV

Statement by the Interim Head of the Department of Public Information on operative paragraph 55 of draft resolution B

1. I will limit my remarks to draft resolution B which, thanks to your skilful leadership, has been drafted in a spirit of cooperation and, I am told, with excellent teamwork among the various delegations concerned.

2. At the request of several delegations, I would like to address, in particular, operative paragraph 55 of the draft resolution, which reads as follows:

> "Requests the Secretary-General in the meantime, and until it has taken a decision on the proposals to be presented for the multilingual development, maintenance and enrichment of the United Nations web site, to ensure, to the extent possible, while maintaining an up-to-date and accurate web site, the equitable distribution of financial and human resources within the Department of Public Information allocated to the United Nations web site among all official languages on a continuous basis".

3. I know that the issue lying behind this somewhat complicated formulation is a matter of concern to many delegations. I wish to assure the members of the Committee that I will do my utmost to ensure that this request, and the spirit of this request, is carried out from within our existing resources, with no additional financial implications at this stage. At the same time, we will continue to make the most effective use of these resources to build on the achievements we have accomplished so far with regard to the United Nations web site.

4. I hope this clarification will be useful to the Committee.

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